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*Humorous Tales
of Bennington-on-the-Hill*

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Mrs. Margaret Fay Brown
(Frontispiece)

HUMOROUS TALES of BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

*Collected and written for her Sons and Daughters
by one who was born near the site of the
Old Continental Store House*

Gayhan, Richard S.

CLEVELAND, OHIO

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To
Mrs. Margaret Fay Brown,
Great-great grand-daughter of Landlord
Fay of the Catamount Tavern,
whose cheery presence has given the writer
many a happy hour, this Book is
affectionately dedicated.

PREFACE

I AM NOT a ready writer, so I pray you good friend, as you read these tales, to temper your criticisms with mercy. It is not of my own volition that I am writing, but upon the request of numerous friends in Bennington, who have urged me for several years to write down the stories which I learned and have retained since childhood. Many of the anecdotes which I am relating, were told me by the late Mr. Franklin Blackmer, whose wonderful memory and conversational gifts, appealed to me strongly in my boyhood days. I am also indebted to Miss Ellen Scott, Miss Adeline Waters, Miss Katherine Hubbell, and Mrs. Mary Russell Pickett Biyer for much of my material. The beautiful and serious side of the history of Bennington Center as I prefer calling it, loving as I do the name, the village bore in my childhood, has been so wonderfully set forth in the book by Mr. and Mrs. John V. D. S. Merrill, that I have decided to

PREFACE

confine myself strictly to the humorous side, and expect to take up the quaint sayings and doings of some of the old inhabitants.

RICHARD S. BAYHAN

Cleveland, Ohio. September 16, 1913.

CONTENTS

Prologue	13
Chapter I. Uncle Hi	15
Chapter II. Granny Spiers	26
Chapter III. Various People	33
Pussy Card	33
One on Mr. Franklin Blackmer.....	35
Munson and his poetry.....	35
Hannah Haynes	40
Nancy Black	40
Liz Dibble	41
How Aunt Sally Blatchford called on her dying (?) brother.....	42
Aunt Mindy's Cider Mill.....	43
Anecdote of Mrs. Benj. R. Sears (Mary Ann Waters)	44
Anecdote of Colonel Martin Scott.....	46
Chapter IV. Various People (Continued). ..	48
Granny March's Night-cap.....	48
Mrs. Von Dorn, Aunt Betty Caslin and the bowl of Tomato Soup.....	50

CONTENTS

Chapter IV (Continued)

How Nora Flannigan testified at the County Court	52
How Colonel Sherill and Jacob Poole called on Mrs. Hyde.....	55
Aunt Betty Caslin's Funeral.....	56
Ann Brooks	58
Occurrences personally recollected by the Author	60
L'Envoi. The old hill today.....	66
Bennington Center	68

ILLUSTRATIONS

Mrs. Margaret Fay Brown.....(<i>Frontispiece</i>)	✓
Home of Mrs. Margaret Brown.....	26 ✓
The Hubbell Home.....	33 ✓
Mr. Franklin Blackmer.....	39 ✓
Mrs. Mary Pickett Biyer.....	43 ✓
Mrs. Mary Ann Waters Sears.....	44 ✓
Miss Ellen Scott.....	48 ✓
The Old Poole Homestead.....	55 ✓
The State Arms House.....	66 ✓

PROLOGUE

BENNINGTON! What a host of recollections pass before the mind of a man born in Vermont, as he hears or reads the name famous in history. How the memories throng of the old days, when fireplaces, foot-stoves and warming-pans were in vogue; when husking-bees drew crowds of merry maidens and sturdy lads (each of whom sought for the lucky red ear and the reward which it brought); when the Old Meeting-house was filled every Sunday to hear a sermon an hour and a half long, while the "Sweet singers in Israel" filled the Choir Gallery at the rear of the Auditorium, and accompanied by various orchestra instruments, flooded the church with music of which the whole State was justly proud. Could our staid and dignified ancestry arise from their quiet resting-places in the old Cemetery and walk our streets today, they would see another Bennington. Railroads, trolleys, a water system, electric lights, fur-

PROLOGUE

naces, automobiles, the famous Battle Monument, oiled streets, telegraphs, telephones, etc. And the Old Church with a *real Pipe Organ*. What would they say, those good old forefathers of ours? Would they regard our modern conveniences as "Inventions of the Evil One"? I think not. I think they would rejoice that we had progressed. They are gone, but around us stand the everlasting hills which they loved. And now we turn from modern Bennington, to Bennington of long ago, and first I shall introduce to you Hiram Rivers, popularly known as "Uncle Hi."

CHAPTER I

“UNCLE HI”

IN MY childhood days I remember him well, the champion, practical joker of the village. He was a very old man then, nearly ninety, but full of fun and trying always to play some little trick on us. Many stories are told of his jokes. I will relate them as they came to me.

* * *

Uncle Hi worked for a man named Dwight living in Pownal. The men were hoeing, and the geese were under their feet looking for worms. Finally Mr. Dwight broke forth in wrath, “I wish I were rid of those geese, I’d sell them for a cent apiece if I could get it.” That night Uncle Hi took the seventeen geese home to Bennington in his wagon. He put seventeen pennies in a bag, which he tied around the gander’s neck with the following note:

HUMOROUS TALES

"Mr. Dwight, I'll bid you goodnight,
For I have far to wander,
I've bought your geese,
For a penny apiece,
And left the money with the gander."

* * *

A famous darky lived on the hill. He was known as "Black Joel." One day "Uncle" was passing through the Hotel yard. Hearing some melodious and trumpet-like snores proceeding from the barn, he searched till he found Joel asleep on the hay-mow. Taking a sponge, wet with chloroform, he soon had his victim sound asleep, whereupon he procured a bucket of white-wash and a brush and when the old man awoke, he was a "White Coon."

* * *

On another occasion, he hoisted a white calf into the belfry of the church at night on the first of April, then tied a string to the tongue of the church bell. Wrapping a sheet around himself, he sat in the grave-yard and tolled the bell all night. The village people thought he was a ghost and were afraid to go near him.

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

In the morning the calf was still there and singing sweetly, and as Uncle Hi was the only carpenter in town, and possessed the only apparatus for hoisting or lowering articles, the neighbors were finally compelled to pay him \$10.00 to take the animal down.

* * *

On the summit of the hill lived an eccentric old man, known as Captain Amos Robertson. His house was always immaculate in its coat of white, and green blinds. Now be it here confessed, that Uncle Hiram was often out of work. So when those days arrived, he would wait till midnight, then armed with brush and paint, he would climb the hill, taking a short ladder with him, and would paint the front of Captain Amos' house in caricatures and in every color of the rainbow. The next morning the Captain would come storming down to Uncle Hi and tell him "Some scoundrel Sir, has had the audacity to paint my house in the night, in the night Sir. I want you to scrape it and repaint it white." And so the "Joker" was sure of work for several days. One night,

HUMOROUS TALES

Captain Amos hid behind the Syringa bushes and watched for the offender. At last he arrived and climbing the ladder, began to paint. The Captain rushed out, grabbed the ladder and shouted, "Aha you robber, I got you at last." The "Artist" realizing that his hour had come, turned his paint-pot bottom side up and emptied it into the Captain's face. The old man ran spluttering into the house to Aunt Betty while "Uncle" decamped for home.

* * *

Uncle Hi was a short, thick set man, while his wife known as Aunt Ramie was very tall. One day my grandmother met him on the street, carrying a step-ladder. "Where are you going?" she asked. "Going to try to kiss Ramie," was the answer.

* * *

One Sunday, after the family had gone to church, Uncle Hi went into a neighbor's yard, and caught a black calf which he brought home. Next he proceeded to attire the animal in one of Aunt Ramie's nightgowns, the fore-legs through the sleeves and the lower end se-

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

curely tied. Just as the devout people were coming out of the "Meeting-House" the frightened animal roaring "Maa-a-a," plunged through the street. It is reported that good Aunt Ramie lost her temper for once, and made some remarks which can not appear on this page.

* * *

On the South Road, lived Sheriff Branney. Several times had Uncle Hi's jokes caused him to appear before the Courts, and the Sheriff had been the man to take him into custody. So Uncle swore vengeance. On the hill lived an old man known as "Uncle Billy Caswell." He was the possessor of an old donkey famous for his depredations in the neighborhood. One night, Uncle Hi learned that the Sheriff and his wife had gone to a dance. After dark, he captured the old Caswell donkey and led him to the Sheriff's house which was built against the hill. The house had a large cellar kitchen with an immense fire-place, which being no longer in use was closed with a huge door. Uncle Hi crawled in the window and opened

HUMOROUS TALES

the door and also the fire-place. Then he put the donkey inside, gave him plenty to eat and having sprinkled red pepper liberally on his back, he fastened the fire-place door and departed. About midnight the Sheriff came home and retired. At 2 A.M., the donkey having eaten all his hay, became restless and began to move around. The red pepper was soon stirred into action, whereupon "Jack" began to sneeze and bray in equal parts. The family awoke and hearing the hideous din, decided that the devil was there. Screaming, they aroused the neighbors, who searched the house from garret to cellar, finding nothing. As the awful noise continued, some one finally opened the fire-place door, and out came Billy Caswell's donkey, filling the air with clouds of red pepper, so that the entire company fell to sneezing like mad. The Sheriff, with tears raining down his face, screamed, "Hi Rivers did that," but no one could prove it.

* * *

In many of his jokes Uncle was ably helped by his chum Tom Rutenberg. On one occa-

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

sion, they went to the mountain with a bob-sled after posts. Uncle Hiram fell and broke his leg. He was too heavy for Tom to lift on the sled, and as it was too cold to wait for help to come from the village, the broken leg was secured with a cord to a stake while a trace chain was made fast to the other leg and to the sled and he was dragged to town on his back behind the sled. When he reached home, the doctor was called. The broken limb was terribly swollen and the doctor took out his jack knife to cut away the leather boot. "Hold on," said Uncle Hi, "that's a new pair of boots." And calling for a boot jack, he placed his foot in it and tore the boot off the broken leg. The doctor was so carried away with his grit, that when the leg was well again, he sent in a receipted bill. Later on, to show his gratitude, Uncle Hi stole the doctor's white pig, painted black stripes on him and called the doctor in to see the new brand of hog he had purchased.

* * *

Not far from the home of Captain Amos Robertson lived an old man known as John

HUMOROUS TALES

Haling. He had sworn vengeance on Uncle and his chum because of their various jokes. Mr. Haling had a niece living in a distant town, who was preparing for her wedding. Her uncle suggested that if she would come to his home and be married, he would pay the bill for a grand affair. She agreed, and the guests arrived one afternoon in various equipages and carry-alls. Old Aunty Haling baked an enormous cake and souvenir pieces were sent to every family on the hill *except* to Uncle Hi and Tom. These two worthies met at the Post Office and planned for revenge. After all the guests had retired for the night, the two conspirators went up to Mr. Haling's home, rigged up blocks and tackling and hoisted the various wagons unto the roof of a flat top barn. Then they departed. In the morning the guests were compelled to pay Uncle \$25.00 to take their wagons down.

* * *

Uncle Hi was the father of several children. One of his daughters was receiving attention from a young man who did not strike her

father's fancy. To all inquiries as to prospects of matrimony, "Daughter" refused to reply. When her caller arrived, they went into the parlor and locked the door. But they had not counted on the determination of Uncle. The house had an immense old chimney with a fire-place in the parlor, which was closed with a large door. One night, the watchful parent climbed the roof and came down A la Santa Claus through the chimney, stepping on projecting bricks. When about ten feet from the bottom, he missed a step and plunged head-long into the fire-place, knocking the fire-board door into the room. Daughter fell into a dead faint on the floor while her "Swain" shouted, "It's the devil," and jumped through the window, sash, glass and all, tore down the street and never returned, leaving town next day. The cause of the disturbance crawled out of the ruins with a broken shoulder, and remarked, to the horrified Aunt Ramie, as she rushed in from the kitchen, "Never mind, old lady, I've busted up *that* match, you'll get no son-in-law *this* time." After which he went to see the doctor and get the bone set.

HUMOROUS TALES

Uncle had a neighbor, who lived almost exclusively on soup. At one time he was working for my grandmother, Mrs. Poole, and she asked him if it were really so that the party in question only ate soup and porridge. "O yes," was the answer, "Rye paste, good to stick paper on the wall, but it won't put flesh on his ribs."

* * *

On one occasion, Uncle and Tom went to the mountain and came across a bee-tree. A problem arose how to get the honey home as they feared they could not find the tree again if they went after receptacles. Finally they took off their overalls and jumpers, the bottoms of the legs and ends of the sleeves were tied, then the honey comb was packed in and the two worthies tramped home with the *find* slung over their shoulders on a stick.

* * *

When the old "Joker" was ninety, he went on his birthday and repaired the roof of a neighbor's barn with the remark, "Well, that

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

will do for ten years, then I'll be a hundred and I'll shingle it all over for you."

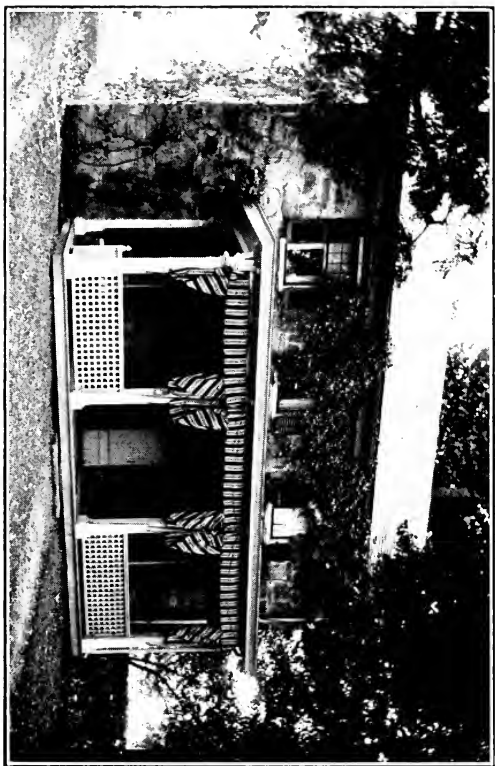
At ninety-three, he called on a neighbor and as he rose to go home, he said, "It is very icy, I'll bet I fall." "I've broken every bone in my body except my right shoulder and my neck." He walked out, fell flat, and broke his right shoulder and it *healed perfectly*. But he never broke his neck, finally passing away while asleep in his ninety-sixth year.

HUMOROUS TALES

CHAPTER II

“GRANNY SPIERS”

IN A large old-fashioned house, dwelt the subject of this chapter. She was famous and justly so, for her sharp tongue. People dreaded to cross her in any way, for her remarks were always plain and pointed. On Sunday she was usually in her place in church. She very much resented any innovation in the worship. Now it appears that some misguided member of the Choir had visited New York, attended an Episcopal Church, listened to some chanting, and had come home fired with an ambition to have the old choir sing a chant. The misguided one purchased copies and persuaded the choir to embark on the new and strange sea. So one Sunday morning the singers arose and began to chant. Granny Spiers was a few minutes late that day and started up the aisle for her seat just as the chant was in full swing. She stopped, turned around, lean-



Home of Mrs. Margaret F. Brown

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

ing on her cane and stared at the choir, and then said to her daughter in a stage-whisper, heard all over the church, "What *be* them critters a-tryin' to do?" "Sh—, they are chant-nig mother," said her daughter, trying to urge her to move on. The old lady raised her cane and shook it at the choir, with the remark, "Well, you'd better take some other place besides the House of God for sich kind of business," and then went on to her seat.

* * *

The old lady had a great deal of fruit in her yard. The boys frequently helped themselves. One night Granny Spiers watched and caught them. After shaking two of them soundly, she said, "If you would ask for fruit and bring something to carry it home in, I would give you some." Next evening, they returned, lugging between them an immense clothes basket holding over four bushels and asked, "Please ma'am, can we have a few pears?" Whereupon Granny charged on them with her broom and drove them out of the yard.

On the top of the neighboring hill lived Mrs. Raybold. She was a dignified old lady

HUMOROUS TALES

whose daughter had made a wealthy marriage. The son-in-law, Mr. Dent, sprang from poor parents. His father, known as old Tom Dent, owned a large tract of woodland near the town. The younger Dent went to a large city and became very rich. His parents were dead but he owned the woods mentioned above. He christened them "The Beeches," built a fine house, married pretty Polly Raybold and came home every summer for a few weeks. During the sojourn of the Dent family, the fine carriage (with coachman and footman) would go up the hill several times a week and Mother Raybold would go down in high state to spend the day with "My Daughter, Mrs. Dent, at The Beeches." The old lady was rather set up by the situation and held her head high as she road along the village street. This was more than Granny Spiers could endure. So one morning as the carriage drew near, she started for the corner, informing her daughter that she was going to "Take that stuck-up old Dame down a peg or two." Granny held up her hand, the driver stopped and the following conversation took place :

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

Granny—"Good mornin' Mis' Raybold."

Mrs. R.—"Good morning, madam."

Granny—"Whar ye goin'?"

Mrs. R.—"To The Beeches."

Granny—"Whar's that?"

Mrs. R.—"Near the town."

Granny—"Never heard tell of no such place."

Mrs. R.—(Bursting with importance) "What, never heard of The Beeches, where my daughter, Mrs. J. L. Dent, lives?"

Granny—"O Lord, I never heard that called nothin' but 'Old Tom Dent's woods.'"

Mrs. R.—(Crimson with anger) "Drive on, drive on."

Granny—"He, he, he, ye will stick yer nose up in the air, will ye? He, he, he, I guess ye come off your high horse a bit that time." And she hobbled home.

* * *

A new building was in process of erection not far from Mrs. Spier's home. Our old friend, Uncle Hi, had charge of the carpenter work. Running short of materials, he made

HUMOROUS TALES

a trip to Troy and was absent two days. While he was away, some boys decided to play a trick on Mrs. Spiers. So they stuffed a straw man and hoisted it up in one of her apple trees. Next morning she made the discovery and called her daughter. "Just look," she shouted, "Look at that, some more work of that devilish Hi Rivers." And poor Uncle Hi got the blame.

* * *

One night, some boys tried to steal some fruit, and the old lady chased them. Among them was a boy who had several brothers and sisters. He stubbed his toe and fell, spilling his apples from his cap. Before he could run, Granny Spiers pounced on him, with the remark, "Ye needn't run, I know ye. When I see a poor, miserable, sneakin' little no-account whiffet, I know what family he belongs to." A few days later, the boy's mother met the old lady and said, "Mrs. Spiers, my son says he did not take your apples." Whereupon the angry old woman responded, "I am creditably informed, that your children never speak the truth except by accident."

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

The old lady lived across the street from the cemetery. One day a neighbor said to her, "I should not like to live near the graveyard." Quick as a flash came the reply, "They are the quietest and most respectable neighbors I have."

* * *

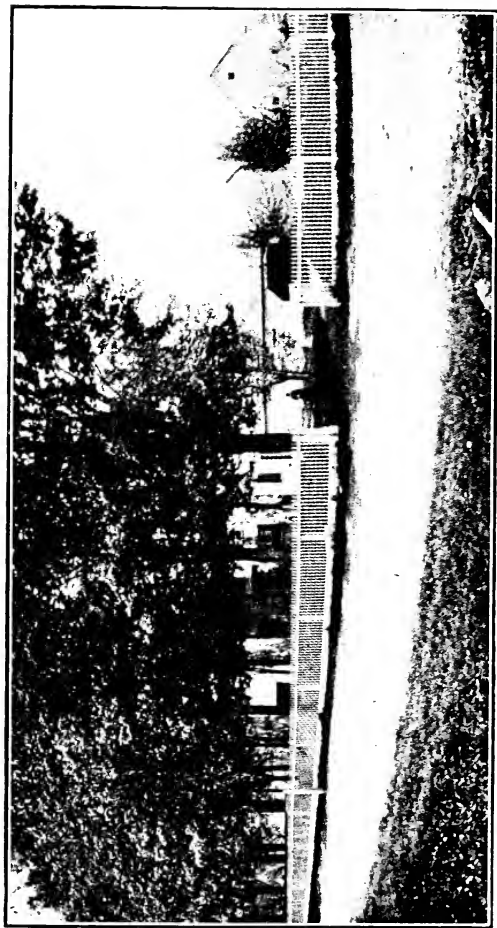
Almost every one dreaded her and kept away from her vicinity, but one young married woman was very kind to her. Later this lady died, and after some years, the widower took unto himself a second help-meet. Gran-ny Spiers was very indignant and said, "I think it is dreadful, when I die and go to heaven, I shall hunt that woman up at once, and tell her what her husband has done." Some one told Uncle Hi of the remark and he replied, "Well, I have my doubts as to whether she ever reaches the Abode of Bliss, but I know one thing; if she ever does get right up into the village, the other neighbors will move out."

* * *

Finally the end came and the old lady passed away. It is stated that when she was

HUMOROUS TALES

dying, the minister called and asked her if she felt reconciled to her approaching dissolution. "O yes," she said, "anything for a change." In those old days, there was always some one in every village who "laid out" the dead, as the saying went. Now it happened that in this particular case that the late departed had once had a bitter quarrel with the general "layer-out." As no one else was available, the "enemy" was summoned. As she entered the room, she noted that Mrs. Spiers had died with her mouth wide open. "Well," she remarked, "your mouth is still open, but thank the good Lord, I've got you for once where you can't talk back."



The Hubbell Home — Erected 1769

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

CHAPTER III

“VARIOUS PEOPLE”

“Pussy Card”

(Related by Miss Katherine Hubbell.)

JOHN CARD lived on Mt. Anthony. He was commonly known as Pussy Card. It happened in this manner. One night he started for home after partaking very liberally of “fire-water.” A man named Wadsworth decided to play a joke on him. So he climbed in a tree overhanging the road over which the victim was to pass and howled like a catamount. As Card rushed past on a dead run, and out of breath, he jumped on the ground and grabbed at him. “Lord, have mercy, the pussy cat has got me,” shouted Card, and to the day of his death, the name stuck to him.

* * *

Once the old man came down to get his portion of grog. He rode horse back and left his

HUMOROUS TALES

horse under the church sheds. The boys discovered the old nag and also the saddle which had a large iron ring or staple in the rear. Procuring a clothesline, they tied it fast to a ring in the shed while the other end was fastened to the saddle. Mounting the horse after considerable effort, he rode toward the church. As he passed the hotel, he spurred the horse to a gallop. And then—oh then—that rope ran out to its full length and “Pussy,” saddle and all, was dumped into the Ogden brook while the horse went home on the run.

* * *

On another occasion, he rode to the village bought a hundred pounds of meal, threw it across the horse's back and then sat on the bag and rode homeward. As they began to climb the mountain, the horse slowed down and finally balked, refusing to stir. Pussy whipped, scolded, kicked and swore, but all to no purpose. Finally a bright idea permeated his brain. Pushing the bag in front, he threw it over his shoulder and shouted to the horse, “There, D— ye, go on, *I'm* a-carryin' of it naow.”

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

One on Mr. Franklin Blackmer

(As told by Mrs. Blackmer and acknowledged by her husband.)

Mr. Blackmer kept one of his horses in a barn belonging to his mother. One night the barn took fire and was destroyed. Mr. and Mrs. B. were awakened from sleep by the shouts of the neighbors. Mrs. Blackmer dressed hastily, rushed across the street, opened the barn door, put a blanket over the horse's head and led him to a place of safety. After the fire was over, some one asked where Mr. Blackmer was. Mrs. B. hurried home and found him rushing around the room, poking in this corner and that, hunting in bureau drawers, etc. "Where have you been," she shouted and received the reply, "Ann, I can't find my necktie."

* * *

"Munson and His Poetry"

All the boys knew "Old Munson." He was very bright, but he *would* drink. When he had five fingers of corn whiskey aboard, he could write poetry by the yard. Mr. Blackmer re-

HUMOROUS TALES

lated the following anecdote: One day the old man came into the store and wanted to buy a pair of shoes for his wife. He guessed at the size, and said, "Charge them." Mr. Blackmer bade the shoes an affectionate farewell as he never expected to receive his pay. A few days later, Miss Janet Elson, a neighbor of the Munsons, left a package at the store. Mr. Blackmer opened it, found the shoes, shook them and this note dropped out,

These shoes are very much too small
They did not fit my wife at all.
I send them back by Miss Janet.
To satisfy a doubtful debt.

* * *

The old man was very funny when he had been drinking. His wife sent him once after groceries. He spent the money for whiskey and brought her a book of Watts' Hymns and Psalms. To her indignant remarks he answered, "Do be caam, the Bible says, 'Man shall not live by bread alone' so I bought you a Psaam book. Sing a Psaam, Sairy, sing a Psaam."

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

Once he started on a tramp for Troy. About half way, he decided to stop over night. He tried various houses but no one would have him as the whiskey was very much in evidence. Finally he went to the small Inn. The proprietor said, "You are Munson." The old man admitted it. "Well," said the landlord, "my son died recently and if you will compose an epitaph for his grave-stone, I will give you a night's lodging free." Munson thought a moment, then took a paper and pencil and wrote the following:

"Your well-loved son, who died of late,
Has just arrived at Heaven's gate."

"There," he said, "I will finish it in the morning." Next morning the landlord insisted on pay for the lodging and finally snatched his hat, saying, "Give me fifty cents, or I'll keep your hat." Munson walked out in the yard and then turning said, "O, I did not finish the epitaph."

"Your well-loved son, who died of late,
Has just arrived at Heaven's gate.
The devil met him with a club,
And knocked him clean to Baalzebub."

HUMOROUS TALES

While on a tramp through Dorset, he begged at several doors, and was refused. Later the church was struck by lightning and burned. So he took a large placard and one night he tacked it to a tree near the site of the church. In the morning, the people read the following verse:

“Ye wicked people of Dorset,
The Lord has burned up your house,
Get down on your knees in your closet
And there be as still as a mouse.”

* * *

At another time, he attended a session of the County Court. A rather ignorant but loud-mouthed lawyer argued the case and Munson summed up his speech as follows:

“For every point he did explore
Showed darkness where 'twas light before.”

* * *

He has also been credited with the following verses on Bennington weather, although some old residents place the authorship elsewhere:



Mr. Franklin Blackmer

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

“Whistle ye democratic winds
That blow by night from Woodford’s dens,
Dare ye assail my domicile
And tempt Jim Howell blood to spill
And tear the shingles o’er his head
Where he and Peggy lie in bed?”

Again:

“The thunder roared, the lightning flashed,
And granma’s teapot went to smash,
While over the hills a great way off
The wood-chuck died with the whooping-
cough.”

* * *

Once with a convivial companion he came to town. Both got gloriously drunk and in that condition went to Prayer meeting at the Baptist church. Munson had a pint of whiskey in his pocket but his companion had finished his bottle. They listened to a sermon on drunkenness and wept maudlin tears as they rode towards home. Old Jones delivered an address on intemperance and then said, “Come on old boy, let’s swear off,” to which the joker replied, “All right, my dear friend—hic—you

HUMOROUS TALES

swear off tonight and I'll swear off in the morning."

* * *

"Hannah Haynes"

Miss Haynes was a dressmaker and a tailor-ess for little boys. She hated men worse than poison. In many New England towns people quickly say "Mis'" when they mean "Mrs." She was doing some work for a family and the small son walked up to her and asked, "Mis' Haynes, where is Mr. Haynes?" Glaring at the child, Hannah shouted, "Thank the good Lord there never *was* any Mr. Haynes."

* * *

"Nancy Black"

Nancy was virtually a tramp. She went from house to house and begged for food and clothing. Whatever garments she received were immediately put on and worn. One day she succeeded in getting seven waists, all different lengths and colors. She promptly put them on, the longest on first, then the next shorter, until she had all seven on, when she

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

paraded up and down the street, remarking to every passerby, "Haint I just beautiful?" Uncle Hi met her and went home to tell Aunt Ramie of the wonderful clothes model from New York that he had seen in Patchin's store window. And the poor old lady actually believed it and posted up the hill to find old Nance Black standing in front of the store the cynosure of all eyes. What she told Uncle when she reached home, I am not at liberty to disclose here.

* * *

"Liz Dibble"

At the town farm, various forlorn waifs were quartered. Among them, was a half-witted woman whose father, Dibble Robinson, hailed from Shushan, N. Y. The town farm was in charge of a man named Barney Wood. As there were several ladies in town named Lizzie Robinson, they naturally did not enjoy wearing the same title as the unfortunate woman, and finally she became known as Liz Dibble. A newly arrived and very solemn rector of St. Peter's church went to call on the in-

HUMOROUS TALES

mates, and meeting the redoubtable "Liz," asked her, "What is your name?" "Lizzie Dibble-Dabble, Shushan, Robinson, Barney Wood, Brass Kettle, you go to the devil," responded the amiable Lizzie. And the rector went—home.

* * *

*"How Aunt Sally Blatchford called on her
dying (?) Brother"*

Aunt Sally lived on the hill. Her brother lived with his son in Bennington, or as up-town people usually said "The East Village." Both the old lady and her brother were past eighty years of age but well preserved. At last the old man became ill and the doctor said to his children, "I don't believe he can live, has he anyone for whom you wish to send?" "Why yes," said the son, "Aunt Sally, father's sister lives at Bennington Center." "Send for her," said the doctor. A boy went up with a note. It was a terrible day in March but the old lady put on her husband's rubber boots and paddled down to the village. Arrived at the house breathless and tired out, she asked to



Mrs. Mary Russell Pickett Biyer

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

be shown to his room. (Here be it noted that the old gentleman who had always used strong language had not been informed that his illness was serious). Aunt Sally came in, handkerchief in hand and sniffing. "I am sorry to see you in this condition, dear brother," she said. The old man raised up in bed and glared at her. "What in h— are you doing here with that Prayer-meeting face?" he shouted. "Get out." Aunt Sally marched to the kitchen. "I guess he'll get well," she snapped, "he is still able to swear; I'm going up town hill." Which she did at once. And the old man recovered and lived over two years.

* * *

Aunt Mindy's Cider Mill

(As told by Mrs. Mary P. Biyer.)

Mrs. Barry, commonly known as Aunt Mindy, was a unique old dame who always drove a close bargain. She had numerous apple trees in her yard and in the Fall she always had a quantity of cider on hand which she sold to the school-children at one cent per glass. As she never went to the cider mill, and no

HUMOROUS TALES

one had seen her with a small press, the mystery deepened, so various people watched and at last were rewarded. One night a neighbor noticed a light in the cellar and very ungalantly "peeked" through the window where he found the method in full swing. Aunt Mindy had an old cane seat chair. This she filled with apples which were pretty far gone. Then she placed a piece of plank across the chair, and climbing on the plank she hung on fast to a strap over head and danced up and down, mashing the apples till the juice flowed through into a stone crock underneath. This was poured from time to time into a keg and then drawn off when the small customers appeared. To say there was a sensation when the story came out, would be drawing it mildly. Poor Aunt Mindy's trade fell off suddenly.

* * *

Anecdote of Mrs. Benj. R. Sears
(Mary Ann Waters)

As a child, I remember Judge Sears and his wife, who were our next door neighbors. Mrs. Sears told this story herself. The family



Mrs. Mary Ann Waters Sears

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

lived in a house just north of the monument into the rear part of which was built a portion of the original "Old First Church" of 1763. Mrs. Sears was one of the kindest women I ever knew and always fed every tramp who came along. In the village lived a notorious old drunkard named Bump. He begged from house to house till every door was closed to him, as he was ugly when in liquor and the women feared him. Mrs. Sears, however, a very vigorous and powerful woman, laughed at their anxiety and fed him whenever he appeared. One day he came unusually drunk, had his lunch and departed. Soon he returned and demanded whiskey. Upon her refusal to play bar-maid and serve him any "drinks," he attempted to push past her into the house. Then it happened. Swinging the heavy door suddenly, she caught him on his neck so that his head was inside and his body outside. Bracing her back against the door and her feet against the box in the passage, she squeezed him till his tongue hung out and he was purple in the face. Meantime, one of the children climbed out of the back window and

HUMOROUS TALES

called Judge Sears. When he came and the door was opened, old Bump fell in a limp heap on the step. He was sternly warned never to come there again. Mrs. Sears would laugh as she told the story and say, "I don't believe any girl ever squeezed him like that in all his life." (NOTE—It is interesting to note that when Mr. and Mrs. Sears were married in 1831, it was a double wedding, the other bride being Mr. Sear's sister Lucy, who married Zebina E. Fobes. All four lived to celebrate in 1881 their golden wedding.)

* * *

"Anecdote of Colonel Martin Scott"

Colonel Scott was a celebrity in his day. He was killed at Molino, del Rey, during the Mexican War. We are familiar with the famous story of how the colonel went coon hunting and pointed his gun at one, when the coon asked him if he was Colonel Martin Scott and as the answer came yes, the coon said, "Don't shoot, I'll come down, I'm a gone coon." The Colonel, however, told this one himself. He was on a Mississippi River boat and among

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

the passengers was a man who had a very ugly face. The Colonel looked at him for awhile, then went to him and handed him a two dollar bill with the remark, "My friend, accept this from a sympathetic stranger, I feel sorry you are so God-abused."

HUMOROUS TALES

CHAPTER IV

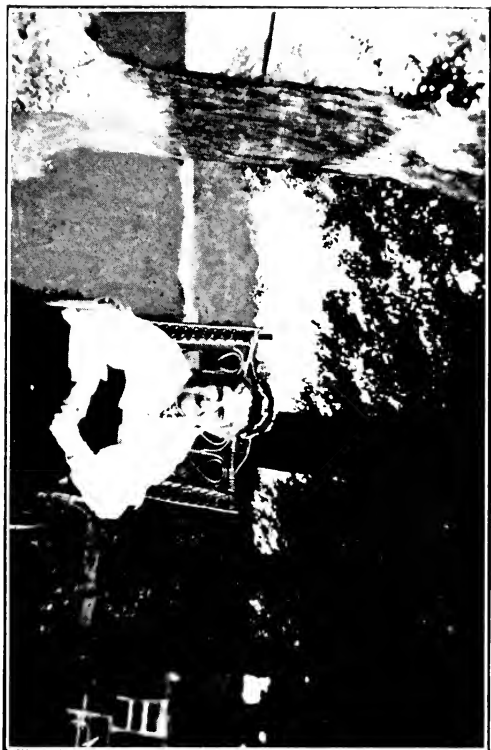
“VARIOUS PEOPLE”

(Continued)

“Granny March’s Night-cap”

(As told by Miss Ellen Scott.).

ONE of the real dignified ladies of the hill was Mrs. Ray. She was a widow who had lived in New York and was on good terms with the “Four Hundred.” Her mother, Mrs. March, lived with her. The old lady was verging on ninety years and her mind was somewhat shattered. She insisted on wearing a night-cap day and night. Mrs. Ray kept one servant, a husky, ruddy Irish girl, Ann Rawlins by name. She looked after the housework and kept an eye on Granny March. One summer several of the “*Elite*” of New York were stopping at the hotel, and Mrs. Ray invited a number of them to tea. She asked Ann, who was a fine cook, to make one of her famous custard puddings. The toothsome ar-



Miss Ellen Scott

(Seated in front of the old farm house occupied by the family for 149 years)



HUMOROUS TALES

ticle was prepared while "Granny" sat in the kitchen and watched the work. Finally all was in readiness and the pudding was put into the oven. Just at this moment some one called Ann to the door. No sooner was the cook out of sight, than the old lady opened the oven door, took off her night cap and poked it into the pudding. Next she threw an old handkerchief into the fire and burned it, pushed a few charred pieces aside, and returned to her chair. Ann came back and said, "Why Granny, what have you done with your night-cap?" "Burnt it up, you dratted fool," answered the amiable old lady. Ann looked into the stove, saw the burned remnants and believed the story to be true. So she put a clean cap on the old sinner saying, "Granny, you are a naughty girl." Well, 'tis sad, but I must tell it. The "Four-Hundred" arrived, so did the pudding. We will draw a veil over the hostess as she started to dish up that pudding and lifted the relic to view. Poor Mrs. Ray, to the end of her life, that scene haunted her.

* * *

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

"Mrs. Van Dorn, Aunt Betty Caslin and the bowl of Tomato Soup"

Mrs. Van Dorn was one of the aristocrats of the old village. She had several children living in various parts of the country. As she grew old, her mind failed and at last she was confined to her room. Her daughter-in-law gave her the best of care and as is often the case, came in for daily abuse from the old lady. One of her beliefs was that her children were starving her to death to get her money. This she retailed to all callers, making little impression, as they knew her mental condition. Not so, however, was the case of Aunt Betty Caslin, a neighbor, who called often and believed every word she was told. One day Mrs. Van Dorn had finished a good meal. The dishes had barely been removed, when in came Aunt Betty. The usual "Tale of Woe," starvation, was told, and the visitor betook herself to the kitchen and berated the patient daughter-in-law soundly. Roused to anger at last, she said, "Why Mrs. Caslin, she is crazy, she has just had a good dinner. Ask

HUMOROUS TALES

the doctor." "I don't have to," snapped Aunt Betty. "I have lived here for years and I never knew Mrs. Van Dorn to tell a lie. I shall go home and bring her something to eat and feed it to her myself." "I hope you will have a nice time," said the other, as she returned to her kitchen. With head erect and flashing eyes, Aunt Betty returned to the bedroom and said, "Would you eat something if I bring it to you?" "Of course I will, my dear," said the old lady, "I am dying of starvation." Aunt Betty rushed home and soon returned with a two quart bowl of steaming hot tomato soup. Stepping to the bed, she extended the bowl and said, "There, you poor abused woman, eat it all." "Thank you," said Mrs. Van Dorn as she raised the bowl and threw it straight into Aunt Betty's face. She was deluged with soup and her dress was ruined. "You hateful old creature, you *ought* to starve," cried the angry Aunt Betty as she started for the outer door. Hearing a quiet chuckle, she turned to behold Mrs. Van Dorn's daughter-in-law, who had watched it all from the kitchen door and who called after her as

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

she hurriedly left, "*Perhaps*, Mrs. Caslin, this may teach you to mind your own business." Aunt Betty never appeared again till the day of Mrs. Van Dorn's funeral.

* * *

Aunt Betty had a voice when she sang which reminded one of a locust sitting on a tree in autumn. When she tried to sing in church it was a source of much amusement to the young element. Once a little girl got up on her knees in the pew in front and mocked her. The joke was, that the child did not stop when the choir did but emitted a wild squeal when the music had closed. Aunt Betty never tumbled, although the risibles of all present were severely taxed and dignity and religion nearly went by the board.

* * *

"How Nora Flannigan testified at the County Court"

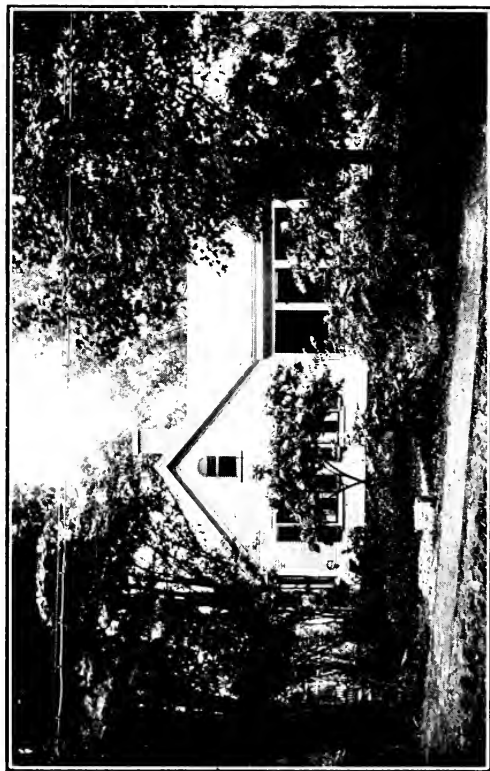
Up on the Woodford Road in Civil War times, there lived a sturdy old lady from the Emerald Isle, Nora Flannigan by name. Nora

HUMOROUS TALES

had a rich brogue which could be heard for a long distance when she talked in the street. Her son Patsy used to imbibe too freely at times. He had a chum in the village who frequently persuaded him to go for a "*toot*." On this chum, Nora swore vengeance and threatened to do him up, if he came near her home again. One day he appeared drunker than usual. Nora was ready, and when he rapped, she shouted, "Come in" and as he opened the door, a pan of greasy dishwater met him full in the face. He turned and ran while Nora seizing an old Flint-lock gun, a relic of revolutionary days, chased him for a quarter of a mile. Later he filled up on more whiskey, got into a fight, and finally landed in jail. The trial came off in the old Court House on the hill, and Nora was called as a witness. The examining attorney had heard of her and her witty sayings and prepared for some fun. (And he got more than he bargained for.) "Are you aware of the nature of an oath, Mrs. Flannigan," he asked. "Faith and I ain't," responded Nora. "Can you swear to—" he began? "Swear? is it, Damn

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

it, or course, I can," she answered amid roars from the listeners. "No, no," said the lawyer, "I mean you must promise to tell the truth." "Sure an' I will," said Nora, "an' phwy didn't yez talk English before, inshtid of Hog Latin?" At this, the crowd yelled and the attorney somewhat rattled, proceeded. "Mrs. Flannigan, did you ever see this man intoxicated?" "Phwat's that?" "I mean, the worse for liquor." "Say man, is it drunk ye mane?" "Yes," answered the lawyer. "Sure, he ain't drawed a sober breath for tin years." "Now, Mrs. Flannigan," said the attorney, "I am told that when this man came to your door, you deluged him with dishwater and then chased him with an old gun." "Now you did not mean to kill him, did you? You knew of course that the gun was not loaded?" With an expansive wink, towards the audience, Nora answered, "Sure, I thought the ould gun was loike a lawyer's mouth, it would go off phwhither there was anything in it or not." Pandemonium broke loose, and amid the shouts, the attorney said, "You may step down, you are excused." "Thank ye kindly sir,"



The Old Poole Homestead — Erected in 1806 by Jacob Poole

HUMOROUS TALES

she answered and walked to the rear door. Turning back, she fired this parting shot over the heads of the crowd, "He thought he'd have some fun wid Nora, but its Nora had the fun with him begob." And she disappeared down the stairs.

* * *

*"How Colonel Sherill and Jacob Poole
called on Mrs. Hyde"*

(As told by Mrs. Margaret Brown.)

Colonel Sherill and the author's great grandfather, Jacob Poole, had both reached an advanced age and were somewhat enfeebled in mind. Being in good health, they sometimes made calls among the neighbors to the consternation of all concerned. Mrs. Brown relates that one day, she, her mother Mrs. Fay, and her grandmother Mrs. Hyde, were at dinner. Suddenly the bell rang and Mr. Jacob Poole appeared to call on Mrs. Hyde. She, being strong in mind and body, went into the parlor and entertained him to the best of her ability, her dinner meanwhile growing cold. At last he departed and as he went, he said,

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

"Ain't it too bad about Colonel Sherill, his mind is clean gone, and he is growing foolish." Hardly had he passed from view, when the bell rang again and Colonel Sherill came in. Again Mrs. Hyde did the honors, and as the Colonel left, he said, "Mrs. Hyde, ain't you sorry that poor old Mr. Poole has lost his mind, he don't know nothin'." Mrs. Hyde went in to her cold dinner and laughed till she cried as she told the family of the two old relics who had come to court her.

* * *

"Aunt Betty Caslin's Funeral"

Reference was made in a previous paragraph to Aunt Betty and the shower of tomato soup she received at the hands of Mrs. Van Dorn. She was a quaint character, well educated and very dignified. Rain or shine she carried a huge umbrella which in the course of years had become a *Bleached Blond*. The old lady was famous for being late on all occasions, and once started for a funeral after the procession had gone to the cemetery. Arrived at the house, she inquired if the service

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

had begun and was terribly mortified when she learned the hour. She lived alone and when she went out, she carried her immense brass door key with her. I have seen her start for town and then return seven times to try the door and see that it was locked. She had been a school teacher and was a model of propriety. She lived to be over eighty and was very feeble at the last. Feeling ill one night, she crossed the street to the home of a neighbor, and the good Samaritans took her in and cared for her till the end came. These good friends decided to have the funeral from their home. The family possessed an old fashioned "Grandfather's clock" which had a tinkling chime of bells attached and played seven old fashioned tunes, one for each day of the week. It was set to play at 12, at 4 and at 8 o'clock. On the day of the funeral (which was scheduled for 3:30 P.M.) Mrs. Doan noticed that the tune for the day was "Widow Casey," an Irish jig, so she told her husband to stop the clock. He forgot it, hence this story. The mourners and the neighbors assembled and the service began. Four o'clock

HUMOROUS TALES

came and found the pastor beginning his remarks as he stood by the casket. "In the midst of life we are in death," he said. "This is a very solemn occasion," my friends, and "—Teedle-Doo, Teedle-Doo, Tiddle-Dy-eye, Tiddle-Dy-eye," remarked the clock. The Pastor waited and the neighbors choked down the laughter that seemed as if it must explode. Finally the Pastor resumed with a suspicious quaver in his voice and finished his remarks but when the people had climbed into the hacks and started for the cemetery, they cut loose and laughed as they thought of the funeral march which had been played for the dignified Aunt Betty.

* * *

"Ann Brooks"

Ann was a tall angular woman with a large fund of native wit. She lived on the south road near a small school house. The Pastors of the churches in Bennington and Pownal used to hold services there from time to time. Mrs. Brooks was very much interested and

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL.

always went. Finally an Episcopalian clergyman from Troy, who was visiting in the vicinity, conducted a service. Ann was on hand and met the Rector. Next Sunday she was missing. During the week the Rector called and asked her to come again. "I haint a comin' no more," said Ann. "You hev too much git up and set down, I'll stay to hum."

* * *

Having had some stomach trouble, she consulted the doctor and tried to follow his advice, which was to omit certain articles of diet and take a hot mustard foot-bath before retiring. A neighbor came in next day to sympathize and asked her how she was feeling, to which she received the answer, "I've biled, sterilized and paralyzed every germ and microbe. For the future I'll eat when I'm hungry and drink when I'm dry." "Naow shet up."

* * *

Once she was sewing for a neighbor. The Pastor called. Mrs. Brooks was not one of his admirers. After a little, the neighbor came out of the parlor and said, "Come in, we are

HUMOROUS TALES

going to have a season of prayer." "I don't want no help that *that* man can give me," responded the old lady. "Yew kin hev yure prayer-meetin' all to yerself."

* * *

On describing the somewhat emotional character of a neighbor, she said, "O yes, she's a agitatin' raound sumwhar or tother; she al-lers goes on as if Satan was chasin' her up to be his best girl."

* * *

Occurances personally recollected by the Author

In the days of my childhood, our Sunday evening services were held in the upper room of the Old Academy and were usually in the nature of a Prayer-meeting. How well I remember the beautiful devotional music led by Mrs. Margaret Robinson of blessed memory. Once a month we had a Sunday School concert, Mr. Yates of the Mt. Anthony Seminary leading in song, while his daughter, Miss Lillie Yates, presided at the organ. Once in a while,

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

something funny was bound to happen, and we youngsters were ready for a laugh. Up in the mountain district lived an old man who was an "Exhorter" so-called. Occasionally he appeared at Prayer-meeting and our Pastor, Mr. Jennings, (although groaning inwardly at what he might expect) felt in duty bound to ask him to make some remarks.. On the occasion I am about to mention, the old man arose and said, "Brethren and Sisters, the Spirit of the Lord is a-goin' up and down these here mountains and these here valleys, and there's religion in it and if anybody wants religion, now's the time to make a "grab" for it!!! (We youngsters nearly fell off our seats, while the Pastor wiped his anguished brow with his handkerchief, murmuring mentally no doubt, "How long, O Lord, how long?") But the worst was yet to come. Having finished his remarks, he decided to pray. He usually proceeded on the basis of belief that the Almighty was hard of hearing. On this occasion he fairly outdid himself. "Come down, Lord," he shouted "Come right now, come quick, come down through the roof, and

HUMOROUS TALES

I'll pay for half the shingles." I have only to add that as he finished, the Pastor arose and said, "Let us sing, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow,' and we will be dismissed."

* * *

On another occasion the bell rope broke. So two men climbed up through a scuttle-hole to the garret and rang the first bell. They remained to toll the last bell. A table had been placed across two seats and on this they mounted. The Pastor had not been informed so when the bell ceased tolling, he announced his hymn and began his Prayer-meeting. Presently a pair of legs appeared in the scuttle-hole, the feet hit the table with a bang and every one snickered. The owner of the feet was so rattled, that he forgot his companion above, grabbed the table, set it in the corner, and then sat down. Then a second pair of legs waved wildly in the air, and the owner said in a muffled voice, "where is that table?" He was assisted to Terra-Firma but the Prayer-meeting spirit had vanished, and after several ineffectual attempts to restore order, the Pastor closed the meeting.

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

My grandfather had a greenhorn from the "Ould Sod" working for him. Grandmother expected company and wished to make some nut cake. So she dispatched Pat across the field with a pail and said, "Go over to Mrs. John F. Robinson and ask her if she will give me some butternuts." Upon arriving, Pat extended his pail with the word, "Boothernit." Mrs. Robinson filled the pail and when grandmother received it and took off the cover, it was full of *buttermilk*. Needless to say that a *note* went with him on his return trip and Mrs. Robinson had a hearty laugh and then sent the desired articles.

* * *

My father always employed men on his farm to help out in the summer. One year a greenhorn from the "Emerald Isle" presented himself. His name was Mike Reilly. After dinner, father asked him if he could hitch up a double team. "Faith and I can, sor," said Mike. Father finished his coffee and then went to the barn. Mike had the team on the barn-floor and stood holding a heavy collar

HUMOROUS TALES

which he was turning every way. "Please sor," he asked, "Does it go over the fut or the tail, sor?"

* * *

Our neighbor, Judge Sears, had an experience also. A new arrival, Patrick Day, worked for the Judge. "Do you understand oxen," he was asked? "Yis," said Pat. "Alright," said Judge Sears. "Go out to the barn and feed them. Give them each a peck of corn; don't shell it Patrick, feed it in the ear." After a few minutes, Pat returned to the kitchen. "Divil a bit wad they ate, excipt two ears apiece, judge," he announced. "What," said Mr. Sears, "you must be mistaken." "Come, see for yerself thin," said Pat. The Judge went to the barn and found the oxen moving restlessly about with an ear of corn stuck in each ear. Pat had fed the corn as directed *in the ear*.

* * *

My father disliked drunken people above all others. At one time he had in his employ a man who was an excellent worker but who

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

would drink. One day after a prolonged spree, he reeled into the yard. Father saw him coming and shouted, "Thomas get out of here, I won't have you on my place. You are drunk." Straightening himself up, he pointed at my father and replied, "John, hic—I ain't so *think* as you *drunk* I am.."

* * *

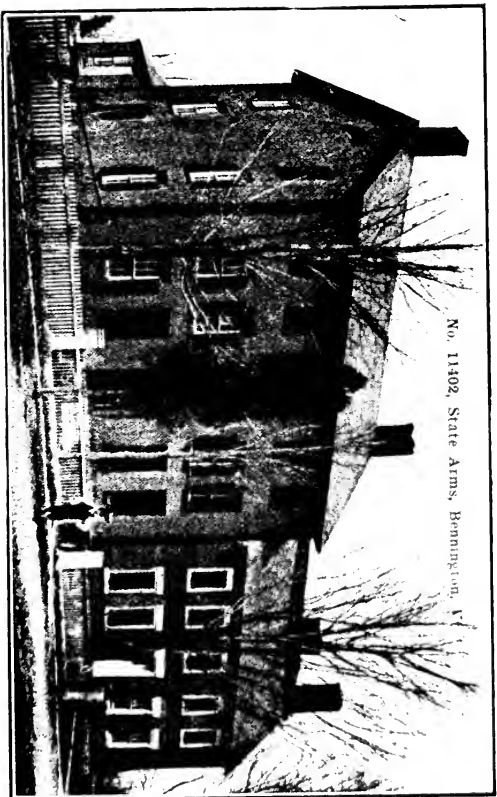
HUMOROUS TALES

L' ENVOI

The Old Hill Today

TO one whose memory goes back nearly fifty years, the changes have been sweeping. Gone are the old-fashioned folks of early days. Gone are the old homes which crowned the summit of the hill, where the monument now rises. Among those old houses, there stands forth in my memory the "Old State Arms House." Once in the by-gone years, it was connected with the adjoining house, the upper story of which was one large Ball-Room. The walls were tinted to represent trees and grasses. The ceiling, oval in form, was painted like the sky, showing the clouds and the full moon rising. Up in one corner was the "Fiddler's Box," which was reached by a short ladder. And I seem to see them, the groups of happy lads and lasses, who gathered in the great dining room of the hotel for supper, and then

No. 11402, State Arms, Bennington, Vt.



The Old State Arms House — Erected in 1780

OF BENNINGTON-ON-THE-HILL

passed through to the other house to join in the quaint old dances of days long vanished. Out, out into the "Great Beyond" they have passed nearly all of those whom I have recalled in this little narrative and with them a host of other friends who have gone to that happy land below the horizon, the Land o' the Leal toward which our footsteps all are bending.

* * *

HUMOROUS TALES

BENNINGTON CENTER

JUST a peaceful, quiet village,
Nestling mid the mountains green,
Giving to the weary traveler,
Her tranquility serene.

I salute thee, home of childhood,
Though afar from thee I dwell,
Precious memories are thronging,
Of the home I loved so well.

Like a watchman ever faithful,
Towers Mt. Anthony in air,
Yonder through the peaceful valley,
Wind Walloomsac's waters fair.

May Heaven's gracious benediction,
Bless thee with its richest store,
And the love of God our Father,
Rest upon thee evermore.

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